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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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BANDING RECORDS TELL STORY OF BIRD MIGRATIONS AND LONGEVITY

Seven million birds—representing more than 600 species—have been banded in North America since the banding program started at the turn of the century. Thus an idea which was put to work in the Old World by a Danish schoolmaster in 1899 has become a valuable tool for ornithologists, conservationists, and those engaged in the management of waterfowl and other kinds of game birds in the United States and Canada.

All 7,000,000 records are on file in the banding office of the Fish and Wildlife Service at the Patuxent Research Laboratory at Laurel, Maryland. The Canadian Wildlife Service is cosponsor of the mammoth banding program but to avoid duplication and confusion all bands are assigned by the Fish and Wildlife Service and all records are maintained at the Patuxent office.

The story of bird banding in North America is briefly told in Wildlife Leaflet 373, just issued by the Fish and Wildlife Service. According to the leaflet more than 600,000 of the banded birds have been recovered or their return to the place of banding noted and recorded. The banding data gives an indication of bird migration routes and in many instances tells how long birds live in the wild state.

One pintail duck banded in North Dakota was killed in South America; another pintail banded in California was shot on a Pacific Island 4,500 miles away three months later; still another was killed in England just 21 days after being banded in Labrador.

Up to the present time, the leaflet shows, a Caspian tern banded near St. James, Michigan, and killed in Ottawa County, Ohio, 26 years later, holds the record for longevity among banded wild birds. A purple martin was found dead 14 years after banding; a red-winged blackbird, banded in New York was shot 14 years

later in North Carolina; a Cape Cod black duck was killed 17 years later in Newfoundland; an Arctic tern was recaptured twice after banding and was finally found dead 22 years after the initial marking.

Recoveries of the Arctic tern show that that bird has the longest migration, extending from the Arctic to the Antarctic. This exceptionally long-distance migrant travels 25,000 miles a year as it follows the sun from north to south and back again. One tern banded in Maine was found dead on the Niger River delta in Africa; another banded in Labrador was found in France; a third banded in New Brunswick died in Scotland; yet another Labrador bird was recovered in South Africa.

The Danish schoolmaster who started this big program was H. C. C. Mortensen. He first banded storks, teals, and starlings. Dr. Paul Bartsch, of the Smithsonian Institution, is listed in the leaflet as the first bird bander in America, beginning his work in 1902. The first bands read "Return to Smithsonian." In 1909 the American Bird Banding Association was created and it developed the program until 1920. Then the United States Biological Survey was given the responsibility for directing the work. The Fish and Wildlife Service took over when Federal wildlife programs were merged. The Migratory Bird Treaty Act authorizes this function, among other investigations, to obtain information required for improving methods of protecting migratory birds and for regulating the migratory waterfowl hunting seasons.

Most of the bird banding in the United States and Canada is done by volunteer workers, although there is considerable banding of waterfowl and game birds by persons engaged in or affiliated with wildlife management. Both the American and the Canadian Services exercise extreme care in the selection of bird banders. Each applicant is investigated not only for general fitness but in particular for his ability to identify birds.

But banding is only part of the job. The cycle is not complete unless the band is reported when found--and anyone might find one. The dead or injured bird along the highway, the bird taken by hunters, the bird caught accidentally in a net or trap, the chimney swift which falls into the fireplace, the bird which perishes in the front yard may be a banded bird. The Fish and Wildlife Service urges that anyone finding a banded bird--or bat, muskrat, seal, fish or any other banded animal--report it.

Each band has a number and instructions to notify the Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington 25, D. C., if the bird is recovered. If the bird is alive a memorandum showing the band number, date and town nearest the place of capture should be sent to the Service, and the bird released. If the bird is dead both the band and the memorandum should be sent. Bands will be returned to persons wanting to keep them for souvenirs.

The bands are of aluminum and come in 14 sizes. They are the split-ring type and can be opened to fit over the bird's leg, then closed with pliers so that the ends meet evenly and snugly.

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